

COVER STORY

Interview with Muammar Qadhafi

'I am a mixture of Washington and Lincoln'

■ Western journalists jokingly call it "the bar scene from 'Star Wars'"—referring to the nightly gathering of wildly assorted business people, mullahs, terrorists and advisers—Soviet and otherwise—in the lobby of the posh Al Kabir Hotel. "Everyone's waiting to see Qadhafi," explains a Damascus-based Kurdish rebel leader.

Many don't make it. The Libya of Muammar Qadhafi, "the Leader," is no longer the fountain of money it once was for salesmen of every description. Libya's more than 3 million people are tightening their belts. Though the breadlines of last year have all but disappeared, freight cranes in the port of Tripoli are idle, and Libyans queue up to buy everything from disposable diapers to light bulbs. At least half the shops on Tripoli's First of September Street have closed.

Those who do see Qadhafi are mostly certifiable "revolutionary fighters." Despite a staggering drop in Libya's annual oil revenues—at least \$20 billion since the late '70s—he continues to finance a long list of terrorist groups. "There's been no slowdown in funds or backing for revolu-

tion," says a Moscow-educated member of Georges Habbash's Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine. Nor is there any lessening of the frenzied anti-Semitism and open hatred of the Reagan administration that permeate both government and public.

The image of Qadhafi as terrorist leader has changed, however, since the U.S. air strike last April in retaliation for a Libya-sponsored bombing in West Berlin. The image is no less violent, but with the unmasking of Syria's Hafez Assad as a calculating manipulator of state terrorism who tries to deny his role, Qadhafi appears as much an erratic cash cow as a guiding genius of revolution.

Qadhafi rarely has been seen in public since the raid. But one evening in late October, wearing a stylish jump suit, he climbed the red-carpeted stairs of his mansion, which had been damaged in the American attack. There, surrounded by pieces of shattered glass and marble, he talked with *U.S. News & World Report* Senior Correspondent Richard Z. Chesnoff and American writer Barbara Victor, author of *Terrorism*, who is now at work on a book about Qadhafi.

Q Colonel Qadhafi, is there any way to break the stalemate between the U.S. and Libya?

When there is a change in the President of the United States, there will be understanding not only between our two countries but with other countries as well. Reagan now represents the interests of the Israelis, and he is under the influence of his foreign minister, who is an Israeli.

Q But Secretary of State Shultz is an American, born in the U.S.—

He's sacrificing the interests of the Americans in favor of the Israelis. The bombing raid on Libya was for the interests of the Israelis, because there is no Libyan-American problem.

Q What you refer to as "support of liberation movements" Americans see as terrorism—

What you view as terrorism is the Palestinian struggle for liberation against the Israelis. And whatever Reagan is calling terrorism is actually a struggle of the people's liberation movement against terrorism.

What the Americans are doing is a terrorist act, and what the Israelis are doing is a terrorist act. What the Palestinians, Nicaraguans, the Lebanese are doing—this is a liberation movement.

Q But this "struggle" results in American deaths—

Exactly. America will be harmed because it involved itself for the benefit of the Israelis.

Q What is the resolution of the Palestinian question?

There is no resolution. The Palestinian people, behind the Arab nation, will continue fighting till the end.

Q Is the end the destruction of Israel? Is that the final solution?

Maybe the destruction of the Arabs, maybe the destruction of Israel.

Q What's your reaction to suggestions that there was a Reagan administration disinformation campaign against you?

The American people sit accused because they have not yet tried Reagan and his gang for this scandal of disinformation, which outdid the Watergate scandal. Also, they have not even tried him for this crime that you see here [pointing to the rubble around him]—as a killer and a murderer and a madman. Does this serve the interests of the American people? Does this build friendship?

Q There were reports that after the bombing raid you were deeply depressed—

This is part of the disinformation campaign, because during that period I was out with the people more than normal.

Q Do you think President Reagan tried to kill you?

You can see [laughing and gesturing to the ruins surrounding him]. He should be tried as a killer, as a murderer.

Q Have the events of the



"The Leader" plays to an audience in his bombed Tripoli residence

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last six months altered your support of what the U.S. considers terrorist movements?

We have increased our support for the liberation movements of the Palestinians and for all liberation movements throughout the world. To react to this aggression, we have doubled our efforts with the liberation movements.

Q Even if your activities provoke a similar response from the U.S. government—

Even if they hit us with the atomic bombs!

Q Do the Abu Nidal and Georges Habash groups [both linked to terrorism] use Libya as a base for their operations?

Libya is open for the Palestinians.

Q Is the Soviet Union still behind you as solidly as before?

We are satisfied with the relationship with the Soviet Union—with our friendship with the Soviet Union.

Q Would you comment on the recent break in relations between Great Britain and Syria?

The West is mad! It's still with the spirit of the Crusades. They would like to enable the Israelis to control the Arab world, and they want to destroy the Arabs. It's a colonial policy that has not changed.

Q Is there a difference in your mind between anti-Zionism and anti-Semitism, or anti-Jewishness?

We don't hate the Jews, because some Libyans are Jews and some Arabs are Jews and Judaism is a religion.

We don't hate religion; we are against Zionism. More clearly, we are against colonialism. We would consider Palestine as occupied by these people—whatever name you give them—even if they were Moslems. They are occupying Palestine, and they have to be resisted.

I don't think a reasonable man can support Israel. This is a tyrant entity and a terrorist one, and it is manufacturing atomic weapons. Why don't you stand by the Palestinian people, who are persecuted and being displaced from their lands?

Why did the Jews come from Europe to Palestine? Because you persecute them in Europe. They should get their rights as European citizens. We shouldn't pay the price of the persecution of the Jews.

Q If Palestine were to go back into the hands of the Palestinians, where would the Israelis go?

Most of them came as invaders from Europe and Russia, and they must go back to their homes. The Arabs stayed 800 years in Spain, and then they came back.

Q But the Jews originated in Palestine, too—

We accept the Jews who were living with us before 1948—for thousands of years, of course. These are Oriental Jews. But the others are all invaders. The right of the Arabs to resist is much stronger than Reagan and all of his might.

Q The Arabs have been fighting among themselves for decades. Why are they so disunited?

Because of Western colonization. Because the Arab

homeland is divided into 20 countries because of the Western colonization.

Q Would a leader other than Yassir Arafat be more effective in uniting factions within the Palestine Liberation Organization?

Generally, Yassir Arafat has failed. Who's going to be the alternative is unknown yet.

Q Is it conceivable that Americans will face attacks by "liberation movements" inside the United States? Would you support the activities of such groups?

Peoples have the right to defend themselves and to react to aggression.

Q Does a resolution of the Palestinian issue depend on unity within the Arab world?

Of course. Why does America object to unity of the Arab nation? This means that the struggle of Abraham Lincoln was terrorism and was wrong. Why does the United States object to liberation of Arab land? This means that George Washington's liberation was wrong and was terrorism.

Arab unity is a unification of Arab countries into states like the United States. This is the role I am playing—a mixture of the roles of George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.

Q Would you like to lead such a united Arab world?

[Smiling broadly] Yes. Why not?

Q What are your feelings about the fact that thousands of your fellow Moslems in Afghanistan have died at the hands of Soviet troops?

This is a problem that concerns the people of Afghanistan. The Russians came there at the request of the legal government of Afghanistan.

America also occupies many countries at the request of those countries. It had five bases here at the request of the Libyan government before the revolution. Why didn't you consider this as occupation?

Q Has the tremendous drop in world oil prices caused Libya to adjust its priorities, its standard of living?

It is the Western oil companies that are affected primarily, because they lost a lot of revenue. No, we have not been affected.

I have one observation to make. Now, there are two different ideological lines in the world—the Third World: Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Arab homeland. They are in labor of revolution either toward Marxism, which is prevailing—the traditional direction, like Cuba and Ethiopia—or the Jamahiriya. Libya is a Jamahiriya, a "state of the masses." Grenada, for example, during the time of Maurice Bishop: He was following the Jamahiriya line. There was a Marxist coup against him, and he was killed. Then came the American intervention. Cuba, on the other hand, got the other direction, the Marxist direction.

The war launched by America against Nicaragua, Grenada, Cuba—this is compelling these countries to go Marxist. It's like you put pressure on Castro to become a Communist. I am not a Communist, but I might be obliged—just to nag America—to become a Communist out of spite.



Syria sends young women to be trained at a military academy in Tripoli

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